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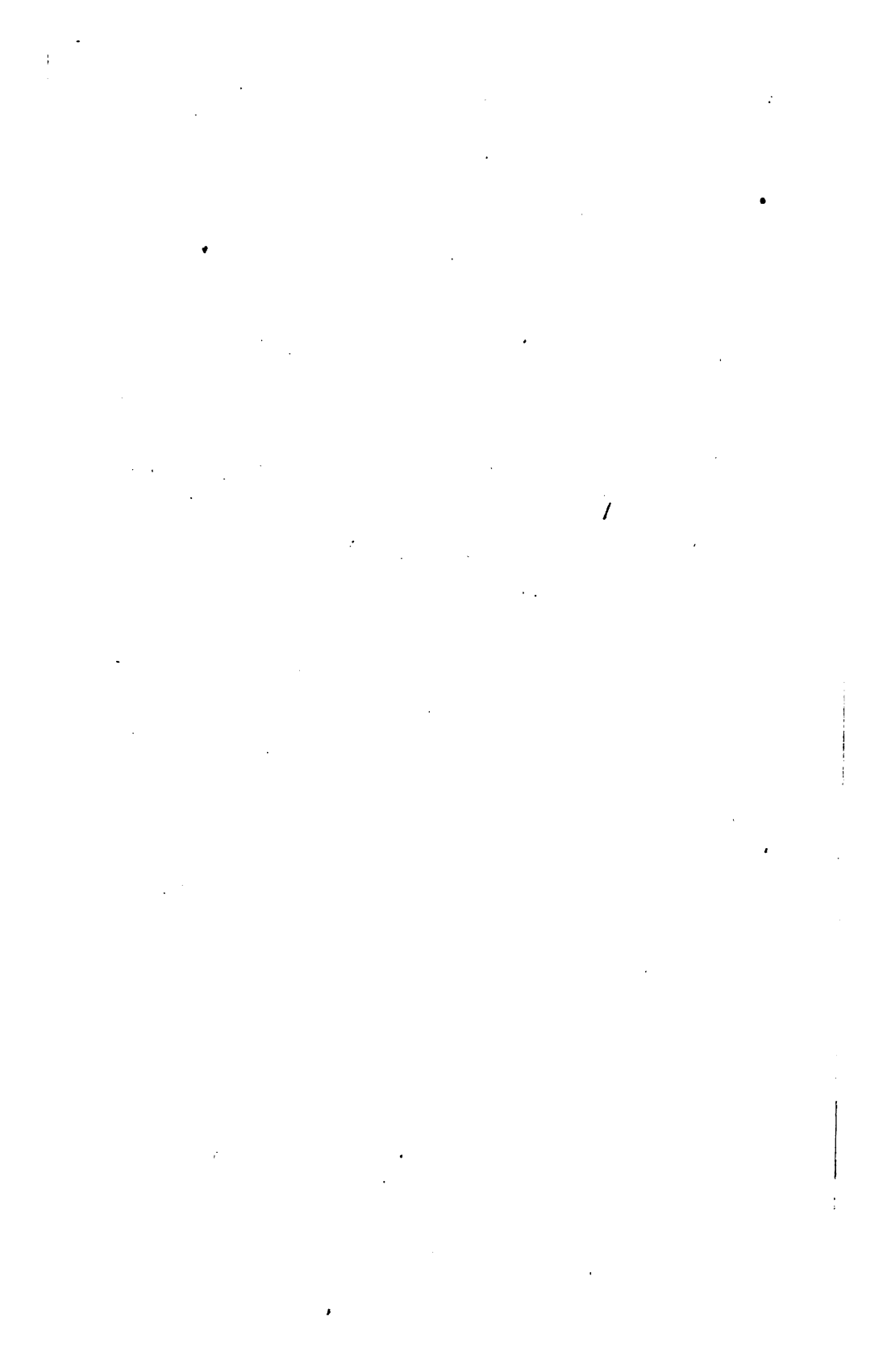
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RUSSIA'S POWER OF SEIZING HERAT,

AND

*Concentrating an Army there to threaten
India.*



BY

CHARLES MARVIN,

Late Special Correspondent of the "Morning Post," in the Caspian Region.

AUTHOR OF "THE ANNEXATION OF MERV," "MERV, THE QUEEN OF THE WORLD,"
"THE RUSSIAN ADVANCE TOWARDS INDIA," "GRODEKOFF'S RIDE TO HERAT,"
"THE RUSSIAN RAILWAY TO INDIA," "BAKU: THE PETROLIA OF EUROPE,"
"RECONNOITRING CENTRAL ASIA," "OUR PUBLIC OFFICES," "THE RUSSIANS AT MERV
AND HERAT," "THE RUSSIAN CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE TURCOMANS," ETC.

"Whenever the Russians march upon Herat, we must certainly occupy Candahar, unless we intend to give up India, or allow it to be taken from us." — LORD WOLSELEY. *Memorandum against the Retention of Candahar. 1881.*

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P R E F A C E .

ALTHOUGH a deal has been written on the subject of the annexation of Merv, no attempt has been made to analyse its effects on the Russian military position in Central Asia. To meet this deficiency I prepared this paper by the light of the latest Russian data, obtained during my recent visit to the Caspian region, and read it before a meeting of the Balloon Society at the Royal Aquarium, February 29th. The exigencies of the occasion prevented its being elaborate or exhaustive, but there is sufficient in it, I trust, to quicken public opinion as to the real significance of the annexation of Merv.

CHARLES MARVIN.

GROSVENOR HOUSE,
PLUMSTEAD COMMON, KENT.

March 6th, 1884.

"Charles Marvin is unquestionably the leading authority of the day in all matters appertaining to the operations of Russia in Central Asia. He has no equal, and can hardly be said to have any rival."—Professor A. H. KEANE, M.A., Author of "Asia" (*Stanford's Compendium of Geography*), &c.

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THE
RUSSIAN ANNEXATION
OF
M E R V.

What it means and What it must lead to.

By CHARLES MARVIN,

LATE SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT OF THE "MORNING POST" IN THE
CASPIAN REGION.

*Author of "The Russians at Merv and Herat and their Power of
Invading India," &c.*

Distance from the New Russian Outposts to Herat . . 140 miles.

Distance from the English Outposts to Herat 514 ..

Who, therefore, holds "The Key of India"?

RUSSIA'S POWER OF SEIZING HERAT,

AND

CONCENTRATING AN ARMY THERE TO THREATEN INDIA.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I am going to demonstrate to you to-night the importance of the annexation of Merv, not by elaborately describing Merv itself, which I have sufficiently done in my works already; but by imitating General Tchernayeff, and giving you a realistic sketch of a Russian invasion of India. You will remember that, during the last war in the East, Russia concentrated vast forces on the Turkish frontier, overran the Balkan peninsula, and finally, after a series of bloody struggles, settled down in front of the defences of Constantinople. This great army of Russians moved along the western side of the Black Sea. Their total number was nearly half a million men. Another army moved along its east side, besieged and conquered Kars, occupied Erzeroum, and was ready to march on to Constantinople when peace was concluded. The strength of this second army was 100,000 men.

Now, I want you to imagine a condition of politics in which Russia should declare war against England, without previously undertaking any operations against Turkey. It was an opinion held by the late General Skobelev, and it is shared by many generals now in power in Russia, that the simplest way to finally accomplish the conquest of Turkey is to upset our sway in India. The idea is, not that Russia should take over the control of India, but that, posing as a benevolent Power, she should help shake off from the backs of 250,000,000 natives 100,000 tyrannical, money-grubbing Englishmen, of whom those oppressed natives are heartily sick. You probably imagine that you are doing

India a real service by ruling the country. It is a view I myself share. But Russians in power consider that you are an unmitigated set of blood-suckers, and that they would be rendering India a service by helping the people get rid of you. They are persuaded the people would rise if they had a chance. To quote Skobelev's words, "The main cause of the failure of the mutiny of 1857 was the fact that the insurgents were not properly organized and led." Russia would supply that deficiency. If she succeeded, she believes your commerce, and with it your power, would crumble to dust. She would then be left alone to work her sweet will upon Constantinople.

Let us imagine war declared, and Russia bent upon concentrating the whole of her efforts upon an expedition to India. Of course, England blockades the Baltic and Black Sea, but Russia takes up a passive attitude there, and our fleets are unable to effect much injury—at any rate, not sufficient to coerce Russia from her undertaking. Russia begins operations by concentrating her armaments in the Caspian, where, as you know, no power can get at them. In 1877 and 1878, 500,000 troops, with an enormous amount of military stores, were directed upon Constantinople—let us imagine only a fraction despatched to the Caspian, and the whole of Russia's efforts concentrated in giving them transport. The railway system touches the Volga at four great points—Nijni Novgorod, Samara, Saratoff, and Tsaritzin. It would be an easy matter, therefore, to get the troops to that river—incomparably easier than getting them to the Danube in '77. On the Volga is abundance of transport: 700 steamers, and thousands of barges 100 to 300 feet long. The Volga is the great highway of Russia. It may be a new geographical fact for some of you to know, that if you were to set out in a steamer 250 feet long from London Bridge to-morrow—no, not to-morrow, but a little later on, when the Volga is free from ice again—you could go with that steamer all the way to the Caspian sea. I saw, two or three months ago, a number of large oil-steamers at Baku that had made their way to the Caspian from the Tyne. The through voyage was accomplished by means of the magnificent canal system joining the Neva with the Caspian, thanks to which Russia could despatch any number of transports to the Caspian sea. But these would not be needed. On the Caspian Russia has fifty powerful steamers, and twenty more from 150 to 250 feet long are to be added this year. This rapid growth of the Caspian marine is due to the development of the Baku petroleum region, incomparably the richest in the world.

I wish I had more time to describe Baku. That is the point I fix upon as the base of any operations against India. Ten years ago an English official passed through Baku, and saw nothing of interest. Ten years ago an English officer passed through and saw only one wooden jetty. The town that has risen there since has a frontage of six miles along the bay; 7,000 vessels enter and leave the port every year; the port contains twenty-five piers, with an aggregate accommodation for 100 steamers at one and the same time; the 200 oil refineries contain any amount of engineering skill—a valuable adjunct to an army; and a railway, opened a few months ago, enables any portion of the army of the Caucasus, 100,000 strong on a peace footing, to co-operate at Baku with the forces arriving from the Volga against India. Without experiencing anything like the difficulty she encountered in 1877, Russia could assemble at Baku an army quite as large as she invaded Turkey with then, it would have better transport, the troops would arrive at the base in better trim, and they would have the enormous food supply of the Volga basin to sustain them in their campaign.

So much for the concentration at Baku. From there across to Krasnovodsk is a sixteen hours' run. I have told you Baku possesses pier accommodation to load 100 steamers at the time. There would thus be no difficulty in ferrying the army across the Caspian, nor yet in conveying it in tugged barges to Michaelovsk, should the railway from Krasnovodsk to that point be not then finished. At Michaelovsk the army would come in contact, for the first time, with the immense deserts which the dressing-gown school of English politicians used to regard as a barrier to the Russian advance, and which even now, in these days of enlightenment, certain Rip van Winkles still believe in. Ladies and Gentlemen, will you believe me? You can take a third-class ticket for 4s. 4d., and a second-class ticket for 8s. 8d., across this great desert barrier; and when you get to Kizil Arvat station, at the extremity of the Transcaspian railway, you have not got a bit more desert, in the strict sense of the word, all the way to India. From Kizil Arvat to Herat you have in the Akhal and Atak oases and in the valley of the Hari Rud a magnificent soil alongside the highway the whole distance, either producing extraordinary crops or capable of producing them when tilled by Russian peasants. Mr. Gladstone will tell you that many a year must elapse before the region between the Caspian and Herat will be peopled by Russian colonists. I retort, What about Baku? Look at Merv! Three years ago it was one of the most inac-

cessible spots in the world. Even Lord Salisbury regarded it as a barrier likely to last some years. Yet, in a few weeks' time, Merv will be in the Postal Union, and if any of my Russian friends go there I shall be able to send them a letter for 2½d. If you will turn up the Candahar debates and the Candahar speeches, you will find that there is hardly a prediction made by the present Government in regard to the Russian advance that has not been falsified by events, which ought to have been foreseen, and, as a matter of fact, were foreshadowed by more than one Conservative statesman.

The Russian railway system—for the Transcaspian railway is a natural extension of the Baku-Batoum railway—terminates at Kizil Arvat, 144 miles from the Caspian. Now, I should like you to remember a very great fact, and one which I hope you will never allow any gammon-monger to humbug out of your memories, and that is this. Russia's steam communication terminates at Kizil Arvat. From her home provinces she can send to that point as large an army as she invaded Turkey with, and an incomparably larger army than you can ever hope to send to India; but whereas—and please remember this—but whereas that army could be conveyed thither without any enemy being able to molest a single man, or even to report its movements, for in time of war the Russians would cut off all telegraphic communications with abroad, your army of defence would be open to attack the whole of the way to India, for a period of three weeks, by means of cruisers and disguised torpedo-boats. Now that the Merv Turcomans are annexed, Russia has no enemy to fear the whole way to Herat; and while you must guard every inch of your road to India—a serious drain on your resources—she need not detach a single Cossack to defend her forces the whole of the distance to Herat.

From Kizil Arvat to Askabad, 135 miles, there is a wagon service in operation. Turcoman settlements extend the entire distance, forage and food are plentiful, and travelling is as easy as in any part of Russia. The garrisons along the road at present number 7,000 troops, who are encouraged to settle down in the country on the expiration of their term of service. I wish I had with me, to show you, some photographs of Askabad I saw at Baku. Askabad, which was as troublesome to get at as Merv three years ago, now possesses all the features of a prosperous Russian town. Before long the railway will be extended thither. To extend it the whole distance from Kizil Arvat to Herat will only cost Russia £2,192,000, or a quarter of the sum she has

Handwritten note: "The Russian railway system—for the Transcaspian railway is a natural extension of the Baku-Batoum railway—terminates at Kizil Arvat, 144 miles from the Caspian."

expended in connecting Batoum with Baku. The political and strategical effect of the Russians running a locomotive into the Key of India would be worth ten times, nay, twenty times, that outlay in hastening the solution of the Eastern Question, the existence of which exercises such a disastrous, such a paralyzing effect on Russian progress, Russian trade, and Russian finance.

* At Askabad we first come face to face with Merv, distant 200 miles from it by a direct road across the desert, which is impracticable, or by another extending straight ahead to Kahka, and then striking off at right angles *via* the Tedjend oasis. This is a little longer. You have recently been told over and over again by certain howling dervishes of Parliament and the Press, that Merv does not lie on the road to India. Well, it does not require one to be a Cabinet Minister to realise that fact. Merv was on the road to India when the Russian advance lay through Turkestan. As you are probably aware, and as General Tchernayeff has just found to his cost, there are two Russian advances towards India, two Russian movements, one from Turkestan managed from Tashkent, and the other from the Caspian controlled from Tiflis. Now, I do not profess to know all the secrets of the Russian Government, but I believe I am not far wrong in ascribing the annexation of Merv and the downfall of General Tchernayeff to a large extent to the jealousy and the rivalry between these two administrations. Experts in Russia have long foreseen that whichever administration first hooked Merv would secure to itself all the good appointments connected with the encroachments proceeding from that base, and the opening up of relations with India. Bokhara was a barrier between Tashkent and Merv. While the Emir was alive it could not be decently annexed; so General Tchernayeff opened up a new road for his province from opposite the mouth of the Volga to Khiva, and thence up the Oxus, which completely turned the Bokhara impediment, and brought the Turkestan officials into direct contact with Merv and Afghanistan. This manœuvre was deeply resented by the Caucasus officials. I heard all manner of angry ridicule cast upon it while I was in the Caucasus. And, to be beforehand with Tchernayeff, General Komaroff, Governor of Askabad, set on foot those secret coercive measures which resulted in the Merv Tekke chiefs hurrying to his head-quarters and giving in their submission.

Here, then, you have an illustration of the dangers arising from the two rival Russian administrations in Central Asia, which, by the way, the Government jumbled up most confusedly in the

* but exactly "face to face" -

House of Commons the other night. If Tchernayeff had annexed Merv, the oasis would certainly have been upon the road to India, either from opposite the mouth of the Volga or from Turkestan. That the road might not have been a good one is quite a different matter. We need not concern ourselves with that. All we need bear in mind is, that Tchernayeff would have found Merv a splendid base for encroaching upon Afghanistan.

Merv fell to the Caucasus administration, and it does not require one to have the superlative genius of the Duke of Argyll to see that, to an army advancing from Askabad, Merv did not lie upon the road to India. In that narrow sense, as General Grodekoff—for whom I have the warmest personal esteem—explained to me before his brother officers two years ago, Merv is not the Key of Herat. Sarakhs is the stepping-stone to Herat to an army operating from the Caspian. But, until Merv was annexed, Russia could not turn the corner at Sarakhs and advance along the Hari Rud to Herat without exposing her flank to the attack of 50,000 of the finest horsemen in the world. And now you will begin to realise the importance of that annexation. Russia, instead of having to protect her army against those 50,000 Turcoman cavalry, will carry along with her that force to occupy Herat and fight you at Candahar or at Quetta. Russia has, in a word, broken down the only living barrier intervening between the Caspian and Herat, and she can now, thanks to the annexation of Merv, march an army all the way to Herat without meeting a single enemy to molest her scouts. I think you will, therefore, agree with me that the annexation of Merv is something more than the “mere annexation of a few mud huts,” as the Duke of Argyll defined it a few years ago, and that England has been perfectly justified in regarding that annexation with unqualified resentment and alarm.

And now let us get back to our invading army, which we left at the railway station at Kizil Arvat. From this point runs an easy road, *vid* Askabad, the Atak oasis, and round the corner at Sarakhs, all the way to Herat. The distance is 523 miles, and the only obstacle to be encountered the whole way is the passage of the Bakhūt hills, near Herat, 900 feet above the surrounding level, or roughly, three times the height of St. Paul’s Cathedral. This, Ladies and Gentlemen, is the terrific mountain-barrier protecting India from the Russian—three times the height of St. Paul’s Cathedral, and which, even in its present condition, is as easy to cross, for artillery and wagons, as Shooter’s Hill. You have thus no living obstacle, and no geographical obstacle to

prevent a Russian army marching into Herat whenever it likes. The stages are three in number. The first is from Kizil Arvat to Askabad, 135 miles, along the oasis of Akhal, where the Russians have already established a vehicular postal service, and organised the road for the passage of an army. The second is from Askabad to Sarakhs, 185½ miles, where Russia has to turn the corner. Of this 185½ miles of road, forty-seven miles, from Askabad to Baba Durmaz, belong to Russia — the remainder, as far as Sarakhs, passes through what is called the Atak oasis. This is a fertile band of country running alongside the road, with plenty of settlements, and capable of considerable development. It belongs to Persia by rights, but Russia, in order to get to Merv *via* the Tedjend, and to organise the road of invasion of Herat, has semi-officially declared she means to annex it with Merv. Here, then, you have another of the significant results attending the annexation of Merv; for what does the incorporation of the Atak mean but that the Cossack will be brought to within 202½ miles of the Key of India — i.e. within a week's march of Herat. Once the Russians occupy the Atak they will organise it as they have Akhal, and means will be established for the passage of the vast invading army we started with from the Volga.

Atak?

And now for the last stage—from Sarakhs to Herat—202½ miles. Last week, on the day of the Merv debate, the "Pall Mall Gazette" published a map, with an article criticising a pamphlet I had issued to the House of Commons to give life to the discussion, in which it declared that the alarmist party consisted only of myself and Mr. Ashmead Bartlett. My words, it declared, fell on deaf ears; nobody, it said, cared about Merv. Well, before that night was over, I had the pleasure of seeing both sides of the House of Commons, with my pamphlet in their hands, admitting that my words did not fall on deaf ears, and that both the Government and the Opposition really did entertain sincere alarm at the Russian advance. So much for the rash article of the "Pall Mall Gazette." Now for its map. Sarakhs, as you know, is a Persian fortress, lying on the west side of the Hari Rud. Russia does not mean to touch it. She means to turn the corner on the opposite side of the river, and move along the east bank to Herat. By annexing Merv she is annexing the Atak and the Tedjend oases, both leading up to this corner, and there for the moment lies the whole pivot of the Central Asian Question. On this map published by the "Pall Mall Gazette" you will find a most terrific barrier raised to the Russian advance. And that is this:—From the Murghab, or Merv river, a line is

drawn across to Sarakhs, and all the country up to Herat is marked in awe-inspiring characters—"Afghanistan." The inference is, that if this great Russian army gets to Sarakhs, the mere fact of a line being drawn across the map, claiming the land south of the turning point as Afghan territory, will deter it from going any further. Well, such an obstacle may do for men whose life is spent in dressing-gown and slippers, but I do not think it would exercise much effect on the good-humoured, blustering, unscrupulous giants composing the Russian army. It is no use chalking a line on a bit of paper, and expecting the Russians, after occupying Merv, scrupulously refraining from crossing it. Russians, as you know, have no scruples. From Sarakhs up to within a short distance of Herat there is not an Afghan to be seen. The country has been so harried by the Turcomans that it is quite depopulated. Such being the case, can you expect Russia, after getting to Sarakhs, to the point where the Persian and Afghan frontiers theoretically touch—can you expect Russia to refrain from sending her Cossacks roaming all over the country south of it? And can those Cossacks be prevented from dropping into Herat to get their gin and tobacco. You must put the Sepoy alongside Sarakhs if you want to keep the Cossack back.

To occupy Candahar from Quetta, hilly country, infested by fierce tribes, has to be traversed; but Russia can march from Sarakhs to Herat, over the plain, without exchanging a shot with an enemy; and when she gets to Herat she can bombard the town into submission in a few hours, in its present condition of defence. I do not see how England can possibly make Afghanistan swell out to Sarakhs so as to prevent the Russians turning the corner there. If the country is left as it is, unpopulated, the Russians will certainly overrun it, and, the land being well adapted for cultivation and colonization, they will organise it in a few years for the passage of an army. In this manner, the country from Askabad to Herat, 388 miles, which is already adapted for the passage of a powerful expedition, will be rendered fit for the passage of the largest army necessary for turning you out of India. A railway to Herat would render the preparations complete.

You do not need to be reminded that the valley of Herat contains resources for sustaining the largest army. No argument can make you believe that a Russian army cannot attack India from Herat; because, only three years ago, Ayoo Khan, marching from Herat with artillery, thrashed you well at Candahar. If I can demonstrate that the Russians can occupy Herat whenever

they like with a powerful army, I claim to have proved to you that India is susceptible of attack, if not invasion.

And every year this operation is becoming more simple for Russia to effect, more difficult for you to repel. You cannot appreciably quicken your steamboat communication with India. It will always occupy two or three weeks. I know plenty of Russians who would undertake to sever that communication altogether by secretly dynamiting the Suez Canal. On the other hand, every year Russia is growing stronger on her Asiatic confines, every step she advances with her railway renders her better able to shake your power in India. Take last year: by the completion of the Baku-Tiflis railway she reduced at a stroke the time needed to transport troops from Tiflis to the Caspian from twenty-one days to twenty hours—in other words, she rendered available the 350,000 men of the Caucasus army on a war-footing for rapid operations against India. And what did England do as a counterpoise? England, Ladies and Gentlemen, showed her appreciation of the crisis by sending a few Sepoys to mend the caravan track in the Bolan Pass.

The other night, as I sat under the Gallery of the House of Commons, I was very much interested in the declaration the Government would make as to its measures for counteracting the effects of this new Russian annexation. I have only had time to-night to point out part of the significance of the annexation of Merv. You have seen it brings the Cossack to Sarakhs, 202½ miles from Herat, beyond which there is nothing to prevent him securing the Key of India whenever he likes. Merv itself is 240 miles from Herat, and the annexation of the Sarik Turcoman tribe, which is practically confirmed by news from Tashkent, brings the Cossack up the Murghab to within 140 miles of Herat. As Quetta is 145 miles from Candahar, Russia, as soon as she has organised her annexation, will be able to occupy Herat from her new Merv base before you can even occupy Candahar. This is a very serious matter, even if we exclude the incorporation of Khiva, now at length consummated, and the enclosure of the Ersari Turcomans, between Merv and Bokhara, thus giving the annexation of a "few mud huts" the true proportions of the annexation of a province as large as France, with 100,000 splendid horsemen within a few days' march of Herat. These considerations have evidently produced a very powerful effect on Her Majesty's Government; they displayed their anxiety clearly enough the other night. But how do they propose to meet the situation? They have annexed Quetta. Quetta was practically annexed

beforehand, so that this is no new measure. They have established a protectorate over Beloochistan; but we have practically exercised a protectorate for two or three years, so that this also is nothing as a set off against the Russian advance. The only other measure I could catch, and I hardly think you will consider it meets the situation—the only other measure was, that Government would lay papers before the House as soon as possible.

Now, to my view, we must do something more than this, and that something is, that we should get back to Candahar as soon as possible. Go back we must some day, and it would be only right that a Government that blundered so terribly in giving up that city should itself acknowledge and repair its error. The Government, let me say in its defence, trusted too much to the advice of the Duke of Argyll, who is now, thank heavens, out of the Cabinet, and who has become utterly discredited by the progress of events in Central Asia. You have heard what I have told you of the growth of Russia's power in the Caspian to-night; let me quote what the Duke of Argyll said on January 10th, 1881, when the country was agitated about the retention of Candahar: "We are told by the late Government that the danger they wished to guard against was the danger of a new military basis to be formed by Russia on the Caspian. I hold that to be one of the wildest dreams ever entertained." Well, in three short years the Russians have established that new military basis the Earl of Beaconsfield wished to guard against, and the "wildest dream" has become a practical reality.

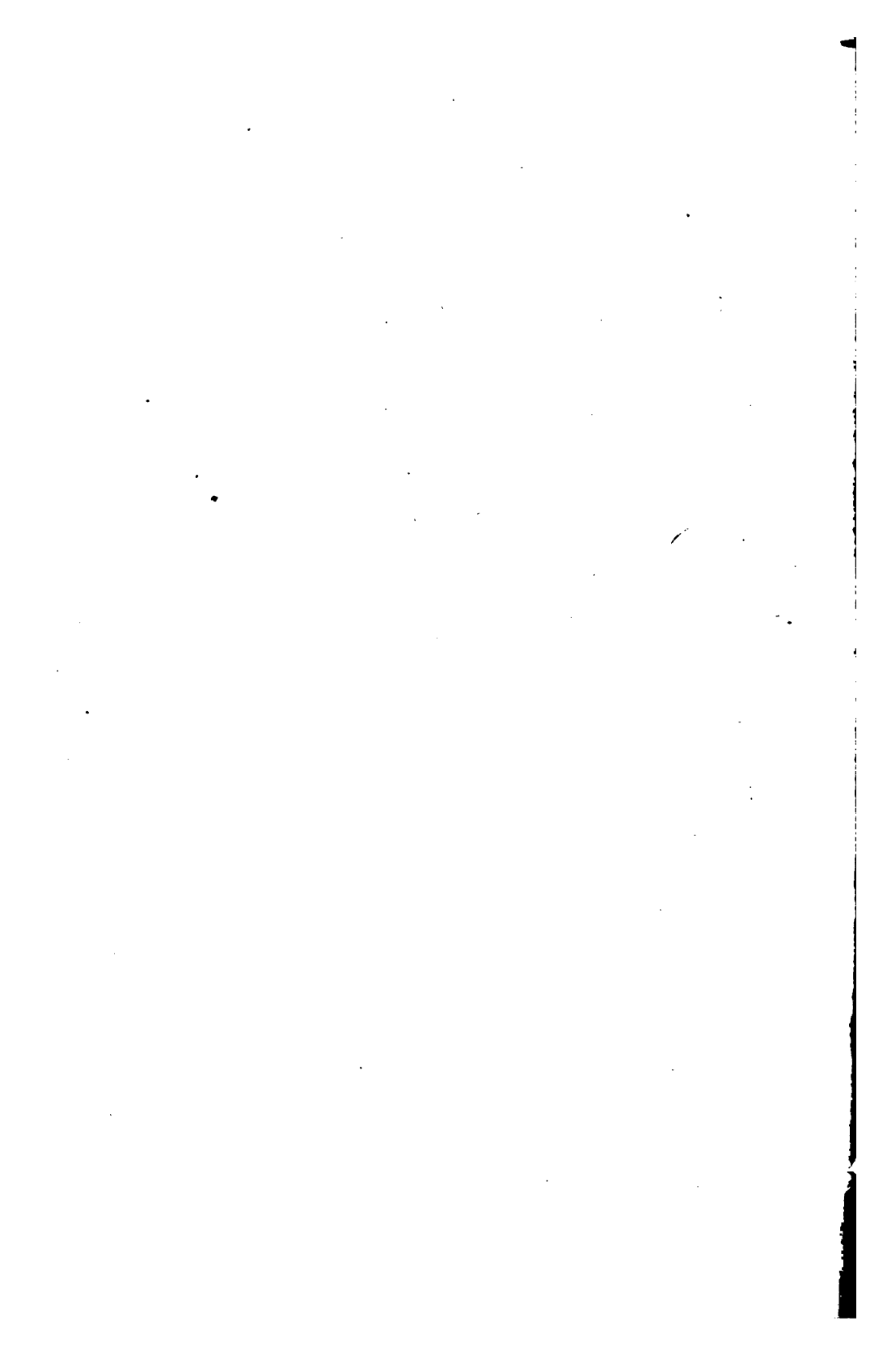
Another point politicians of the Argyll and Northbrook school were continually parading was, that the Russians were only annexing deserts in Central Asia. But a desert, or rather steppe-land, for many of these so-called deserts are prairies half the year round—a desert, I say, is not always a valueless possession. Let me give you an instance, without reminding you what you already know, that in annexing the desert inhabitants of Merv, the Russians have annexed the finest breed of horses in the world. The instance I will give you is this:—a short distance inland of Michaelovsk, on the Caspian, in the midst of one of these barren deserts, a Russian exploring party two years ago came upon a hill sodden with petroleum and ozokerit, computed to be worth thirty-five millions sterling. While I was at Baku I met a Russian official who had recently returned from this locality. He told me that it furnished sufficient oil-fuel for all the locomotives on the Transcaspian railway, and that consignments were being exported to Khiva. This locality was only one of a series

that was being discovered; yet it contained sufficient deposits to furnish annually 250,000,000 gallons of crude petroleum, or enough to light every lamp, grease every machine, and drive every locomotive in the whole Russian empire. Yet you are requested by professional purveyors of humbug—Russian as well as English—to believe that Russia is only annexing dry sand and scorpions in Central Asia.

Bearing, then, these things in mind, you have got to take measures, not only against the present position of Russia in Central Asia, but against her prospective position. Five years ago Herat was quite safe from sudden seizure; even Merv was practically secure. Before this year has run its course you will have Russians posted not only at Merv, but closer to Herat than your Quetta garrison is to Candahar. In face of this great revolution, can anyone seriously pretend that Russia cannot occupy Herat whenever she likes, in defiance of all our threats? Do you know that the presence of only 7,000 Russian troops in the Transcaspian region is more significant than 70,000? And why? Let me answer in the words of a Russian general, with whom I discussed the matter during one of the balls at the Czar's coronation. "We have now," said he, "such a good road to the heart of Afghanistan, and our communications with the Caspian base, and from the Caspian base to Askabad, are so perfect, and admit of such a ready movement of troops, that we only need a handful of men to garrison the Turcoman region. It is cheaper to maintain 50,000 men in the Tiflis district than at Geok Tepé and Askabad, and we can throw them from the one point to the other at a moment's notice."

Such was his opinion, expressed perfectly good-humouredly, and without any desire to give offence. Let me, as a final word, clench it with a very serious fact. You know that Russia invaded Turkey from Kishineff in 1877 with a force that ultimately grew to half a million men. Now, from Kishineff to Constantinople the troops of the Shipka column had to march 750 miles, and of the Sophia column 970 miles. Russia, as I have told you, could assemble on the Caspian a similar army with greater ease than she could at Kishineff. Treating Kizil Arvat as a Kishineff, the distance thence to Herat is only 523 miles, as compared with the 750 and the 970 traversed by the Russian troops in 1877. But, perhaps you object to Kizil Arvat being treated as a Kishineff. Then start from the Caspian, from the decks of the steamers at Port Michaelovsk. The distance even then is only 667 miles as compared with the 1,000 miles many Russians trudged on foot

before they got to Constantinople. And, mark this difference. Russia, in invading Turkey, had Austria to threaten her flank. There would be no such enemy in the Caspian. Russia, further, had to cross the Danube—one of the largest rivers in Europe—in face of the Turks; she had to encounter large armies at Plevna, and traverse the almost impregnable Balkan range, meeting on the other side armies again before she got to Constantinople. In the case of Herat, nothing of the kind exists. There is not a single river of any magnitude the whole distance from the Caspian to Herat. There is no mountain range whatever, only a few hills that the fattest alderman could toddle up without difficulty. And, instead of great armies, the Russians would meet no enemy, but sweep along in their course 50,000 Turcoman cavalry to assist them in their undertaking. Finally, the Russians, instead of having to commence operations from Kishineff, 800 or 900 miles from the objective point, would be already posted at Merv, within 240 miles of it; at Sarakhs, within $202\frac{1}{2}$ miles; and at Penjdeh, within 140 miles of the Key of India. Such being the case, I hold you have entered upon the most critical period of the Central Asian Question; and unless you insist upon a firm, clear, decisive, patriotic policy on the part of the Government, you will have a repetition of the Egyptian muddle, with this difference, that your opponents will not be the sheep-like fellaheen, but men who will take advantage of every blunder—and your statesmen, at the best, are sure to blunder a good deal—to seek to accomplish their schemes of aggrandisement in Europe by upsetting your power in India.



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